

Law Libraries as Publishers

Choosing a Better Font

Benjamin J. Keele, Indiana University Robert H. McKinney School of Law

When you are reading, do you notice the font?¹ Usually, I do not, unless I find the font especially unattractive, like some slip opinions I have seen set in Courier New. But when I look a bit closer and pay attention to the font, I find the forms of the letters I'm reading does, on some subliminal level, affect my perception of the document and its author.

For a document by an official or professional, the font choice indicates the level of care taken in its production. If the document is set in Times New Roman, Calibri or any other default font, then at best I find the writing a bit more boring. If the author uses a different, more readable or more interesting font, then I note the thought and care the author put into presenting her work. Some fonts I find so attractive I gain some enjoyment from reading them.

When law libraries act as publishers, they should pay as much attention to font choice as they do to selecting appropriate margins, column layouts and type sizes. In legal writing, we should also seek fonts that are pleasing in roman, italics, and small caps (referred to in the *Bluebook* as large and small capitals) —the styles used in legal citations. The font choice may also be influenced by whether the publication is designed for print or online reading.

I tend to think first of academic law journals, which are overwhelmingly uniform and dull in their fonts. I

like reading legal scholarship, and yet just looking at the standard law review font and layout saps a bit of my

enthusiasm. Something

different (and better) would

noticeably improve my

reading. The bland

uniformity also undermines

the journal's visual identity.

Yale Law Journal gets to use a

special font made just for

Yale University, and *Harvard Law Review* has been

using Old Style 7 since time immemorial. Not every

law review can have its own font, but surely we can

find something a bit more distinctive. When I was

editor of the *Indiana Journal of Global Legal Studies*, a

compositor handled the layout and used [Granjon](#), a

font that I did not see much elsewhere and that is still one of my favorites.

Law professor James Grimmelman gives [great suggestions](#) on selecting better fonts for academic legal writing. He also mentions some journals that use interesting fonts, like the [Savannah Law Review](#), which uses [Equity](#), a font designed by Matthew Butterick, author of the very readable [Typography for Lawyers](#).

There are many other publishing projects law libraries take on that are not law reviews. Many law libraries have blogs and research guides, for example. Your discretion over fonts may be limited by organizational styles or fonts installed in content management systems. Where you can choose fonts, you can help make more interesting and enjoyable reading material. ☞



¹ Some purists distinguish between the terms “font” and “typeface.” For each typeface, there are many fonts representing weight and size. For instance, the typeface [Helvetica](#) has fonts Helvetica Bold, Helvetica Roman, or Helvetica Bold at 18 point, Helvetica Bold at 20 point, and so on. According to most modern type experts (see this [article](#)), in digital publishing contexts, the terms are often used interchangeably.